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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5// PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001688

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#) [BK](#) [GR](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: BALKANS AS NEW FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITY

REF: A. ANKARA 1651

[1](#)B. ANKARA 1618

Classified By: POL Counselor Daniel O'Grady, for reasons 1.4(b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Turkey is looking to re-engage in the Balkans to regain its historical influence in the region, with a particular focus on Bosnia-Herzegovina (BIH), according to the MFA. On November 19 MFA Deputy Director General for Central and Southeastern Europe, Murat Karagoz, provided us an overview of the MFA's new outreach to the Balkans. He also expressed Turkey's request for the U.S. to engage in the region and support Ankara's bid to extend the NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) to BIH in a package with that of Montenegro despite Turkey not supporting the closure of the Office of the High Representative (OHR). The MFA touted Turkey's continued involvement in the South-East European Cooperation Process and establishment of a trilateral mechanism with Serbia and BIH to enhance regional cooperation. END SUMMARY.

MFA Refocusing on the Balkans

[1](#)2. (C) PolCouns and Poloff met November 19 with the MFA's new deputy director for Central and Southeastern Europe, Murat Karagoz. The Balkans directorate itself is new. Karagoz said the Balkans is a top foreign policy priority for Prime Minister Erdogan, President Gul, and Foreign Minister Davutoglu. The government and MFA are all taking an active foreign policy approach in the Balkans, turning a new page in relations since the late 1990s. Karagoz said that Turkey has a close, historical relationship with the Balkans that unfortunately drifted in the late 1990s when Turkey focused on the Turkic-speaking countries to its east. Turkey is now looking west at the Balkans -- particularly to increase stability, trade volume, and cultural relations. Karagoz relayed that Turkey is supporting democratic structures, including EU and NATO, in the region. (Note: Karagoz said that Turkey includes Greece when it refers to the Balkans, although Greece is in a different directorate. End Note) He gave the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP), of which Turkey is the chairman until June 2010, as an example of Turkey's activism in the region. Turkey has three priorities for the SEECP, which include establishing security, trade, and democracy and human relations in the Balkans. A draft work plan is going out to all the ministries soon, including the Central Bank and Chamber of Commerce, to encourage the process.

¶3. (C) PolCouns raised FM Davutoglu's speech in BIH at the "Ottoman Heritage and Muslim Communities in the Balkans Today" conference in October, which was criticized in some international press outlets for its "neo-Ottoman" slant. (Note: A key excerpt from the speech was: "The Ottoman era in the Balkans is a success story. Now it needs to come back." End Note) Karagoz responded that Davutoglu's speech had been misinterpreted. He relayed that the only reason the FM was discussing Ottoman heritage is because that was the conference's topic and Turkey, moreover, "cannot deny its past." Turkey is looking west to the Balkans, which is an important path toward the EU.

Bosnia is a Key Issue

¶4. (C) Karagoz said BIH is Turkey's highest priority in the Balkans because it believes there will be serious regional implications if it is not handled carefully. Karagoz noted that FM Davutoglu has indicated that BIH should almost be viewed as an "internal matter" because of its importance.

¶5. (C) Karagoz took the opportunity to express Turkey's continued support for extending MAP to BIH in a package with Montenegro. He stressed that leaving BIH out would be a mistake (REF B). As an aside, he argued that the EU had slighted BIH when it decided not to grant Sarajevo a visa exemption. MAP would encourage BIH's democratic reform process. However, Karagoz reiterated Turkey's position that BIH is not ready to transition to a reinforced EUSR despite

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supporting BIH's constitutional reform efforts and NATO membership aspirations. Turkish MFA contacts have told us that not all BIH parties are in agreement on the constitutional reform package. The Bosniak leader, Haris Silajdzic, relayed this sentiment to the Organization of the Islamic Conference on November 9 in Istanbul (REF A). Karagoz stressed that Turkey continues to have a role to play and is not yet ready to give it to the EU, which could happen if the OHR is closed. He added that Turkey consults regularly about BIH with Russia.

¶6. (C) Karagoz lobbied strongly for the U.S. to play a more active role in the Balkans, especially in Bosnia. He contends that the U.S. has a special responsibility in the region and that the MFA sees the US as not giving Southeastern Europe the priority it warrants. Turkey feels alone in the region and would prefer that the U.S. take the lead in the Balkans, instead of the EU.

Turkey Trying to Mediate

¶7. (C) Turkey is trying to cement a working mediation mechanism among BIH, Serbia, and Turkey to enhance regional integration and stability, according to the MFA. Turkish FM Davutoglu, Serbian FM Jeremic and Bosnian FM Alkalaj have agreed to trilateral meetings roughly once a month to move regional relations forward. The three met on October 12 and November 9, and plan to meet again on December 14 during the Alliance of Civilizations meeting in Sarajevo.

¶8. (C) Karagoz pointed out that Turkey is trying to establish a new chapter in its relations with Serbia, which is partly why President Gul visited Belgrade in late October. Karagoz said Turkey knows that it has not had much of a bilateral relationship with Serbia since the Balkan wars and wants to change this. Turkey, for example, is seeking to increase Serbia's positive engagement in BIH. PolCouns asked how Turkey's recognition of Kosovo's independence affects its relations with Serbia. Karagoz responded that Turkey and Serbia have "agreed to disagree" on Kosovo, which he commented is similar to Turkey's relations with Greece. Karagoz reiterated that Turkey was one of first countries to

recognize Kosovo and continues to work with the U.S. to lobby other nations to follow suit.

Comment

19. (C) FM Davutoglu's description of the Balkans as practically an "internal matter" for Turkey is telling. Ankara is determined to reassert its influence in the region, not least because it Turkey views the Balkans as in its immediate neighborhood. In the near term, Ankara is likely concentrating on BIH as a priority because the Peace Implementation Council is discussing Sarajevo's possible transition to EUSR. Turkey would go to great lengths to preserve its seat at the table.

JEFFREY

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